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Successful Reentry of African American Women

Tori Starks

tstark10@students.kennesaw.edu

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African American Women and Successful Reentry:
A Grounded Theories Method Approach to Understanding the Process

Tori E. Starks

Kennesaw State University

Abstract

African American women have a history of being overlooked in the criminal justice system. Despite this, they are disproportionately represented within prisons in the United States. By acknowledging the disadvantages that African American women face, being at the intersectionality of race and gender, it is important that we understand how different factors of society may impact them differently. In addition to African American women being overlooked in the Criminal Justice System, reentry plays a vital role in understanding incarceration and how it impacts criminal justice involved individuals. It is important that the Criminal Justice System is providing criminal justice involved individuals with the necessary programs to ensure that they are successfully reentering and not falling into an endless cycle of crime. This study examines successful reentry of African American women through a series of interviews in order to analyze differences or similarities with existing literature. The goal of this study is to better understand the reentry process of an overlooked demographic and add to existing literature.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

The United States criminal justice system works in a number of ways to ensure justice is served appropriately across the nation. Laws and procedures have been implemented to protect citizens and punish offenders in hopes of deterring criminal activity and behavior on both a specific and general level. On a general level, individuals understand that as a result of different laws and policies, committing crimes will result in different punishments. On the other hand, specific deterrence occurs once an offender has been punished for a crime they have already committed. The goal of specific deterrence is that the process of punishment will encourage offenders to desist from committing future crimes. Arguably, some of the most impactful forms of policy have been punitive policies such as mandatory minimums and strict sentencing guidelines that all but eliminate judicial discretion in applicable cases. In the most recent era of punitive criminal justice strategies - incarceration, often for extensive periods, is frequently the result of such so-called deterrent sentencing policies.

By the end of 2016, there were about 1,506,800 individuals incarcerated in both state and federal prisons and about 626,000 prisoners were released by the end of 2016 (Carson, 2018). While mass incarceration is a prominent issue for all cultures and communities, it is important that the people who make up these numbers are understood. Of the 105,683 women who were still incarcerated at the end of 2016, 46.4% were white, 19.3% were black, 18.3% were Hispanic, and 16.1% were “other” (Carson, 2018). One troubling development to highlight is the rapid growth in incarceration regarding black women. Although black women were second to white women when comparing year-end incarceration rates for the year 2016, their arrest rates were almost double that of white women; leaving the rate of imprisonment for black women at 97 per 100,000 and the rate of imprisonment for white women 49 per 100,000 (Carson, 2018). Alper,

Durose, and Markman (2018), found that 86.9% of black ex-offenders were rearrested during a 9-year period after release from prison with 46% occurring the first year. It was also found that 76.8% of women are rearrested during a 9-year period after release from prison, with 35.1% of rearrests occurring within the first year (Alper et al., 2018). Additionally, studies show that the rate of incarceration has only decreased by 1% since the year 2015 (Carson, 2018); this demonstrates the lack of significant improvement regarding mass incarceration, and displays a need for significant study and policy reform within the criminal justice system.

While incarceration can be used as an appropriate punishment for some offenders, the process of reentry should not be overlooked. All offenders, excluding those facing life sentences and death penalties, eventually are released from prison to face society again. The isolation and alienation that prisoners face during their time incarcerated, can greatly impact their abilities to succeed in society. Because of this, reentry should not be viewed as an easy process. Without proper and much-needed reentry mechanisms and support in place, ex-prisoners can easily still feel like their prison sentence extends far past their actual release.

If ex-prisoners do not receive any form of substantive education and/or assistance with developing specific skillsets needed to succeed once back into the community while incarcerated, or are unable to receive necessary support post incarceration, then the process of incarceration simply becomes a disability for them, limiting their future opportunities and success. This means incarceration is punishing them for a crime and imposing a stigma on them, but not allotting them the tools and guidance necessary to make any significant changes once they have been released. This could greatly increase the likelihood of ex-prisoners to resort back to criminal activity. Incarcerating individuals for crimes committed, but not guiding their efforts post incarceration, is counterproductive to imprisonment. If guidance is provided after

incarceration, the impact that prison has on individuals may be more useful, by encouraging and motivating individuals to actually become law-abiding citizens.

So how do we fix it? A careful examination of instances where individuals successfully re-entered their communities after incarceration is necessary and beneficial for a number of reasons. This type of examination can provide more applicable conversation and policies regarding reentry. In addition, focusing on individuals' success stories who have been through incarceration and view themselves as successful law abiding citizens, reinforces their individual accomplishment of success. This encourages the participants involved to lead by example and be motivation to other individuals going through reentry. Further, they demonstrate that successful reentry is possible. This form of examination may also show community members that engaging with individuals who have been incarcerated can be beneficial to the community.

When considering different policy implementation, business incentives can be created to offer more opportunities to individuals who have been incarcerated. Through a wider implementation of second chance programs and other programs alike, more substantive jobs can provide beneficial opportunities to ex-prisoners. The effectiveness of different programs and courses offered in prisons can be reviewed and programs can be revised as necessary. Programs that prove to be extremely successful among a number of ex-prisoners who have successfully reentered can receive more funding for expansion, while programs that have demonstrated little impact on the success of ex-prisoners can be reconsidered. This allows for more focused budgeting that actually works towards the benefit of individuals who have been incarcerated. By understanding the true effectiveness of specific programs, more prisoners would have the opportunity to participate and reap the benefits. In addition to existing programs, more effective programs can be implemented into prisons as well. This will offer emotional and knowledge

based support, equipping ex-prisoners with skills and resources that they express may have been difficult to obtain, but valuable towards their reentry.

In addition to understanding that reentry is not an easy process, the unique needs of different demographics of re-entering citizens is also an important aspect of reentry to consider. In order to equip re-entering citizens with the skills needed to succeed back in their communities, it is important to understand factors that contribute to successful reentry and how those factors may or may not differ depending on the individual reentering. The issue with generalization of individuals released from prison is that they are different, meaning they have unique needs.

African American women are a unique demographic, being that they are at the intersectionality of both race and gender - which is considered a disadvantaged position. While in this disadvantaged position, they are also disproportionately represented in our prison systems (Thompson, 2009). As a result of African American women being considered disadvantaged and the lack of research on the African American women population (Link & Oser, 2018), this study will focus on what factors have aided in helping this disadvantaged population successfully reenter. This could potentially assist in making the reentry process easier and more assessable for African American women. This research may also offer insight as to how other groups of society can successfully reenter since it is outlining steps to successful reentry among a “disadvantaged” population.

The sample of the current study consists of African American women who have reentered the community and have successfully refrained from re-engaging in crime in general. There was no time frame placed on what “qualifies” their journey as successful from the researcher’s point of view. Allowing participants to determine their definition of successful reentry not only gives more insight to the process that individuals go through during reentry, but also reinforces a

positive self-image. Additionally, it is hoped that the findings of the present study are able to demonstrate a distinct pattern, that can act as inductive research for future studies. In Chapter 2 of this thesis, reentry and its significance will be discussed, followed by an outline of the most common barriers to reentry. This will give the reader a better understanding of the difficulties that accompany reentry for any ex-offender, regardless of race or gender. The concepts that are focused on in this study are health, substance abuse, housing, transportation, employment/finances, education, and social support. These barriers have been described as some of the most common barriers faced during the reentry process. Then, barriers specifically impacting women will be examined. Further, the impact of the War on Drugs and the subsequent “War on Women” will be outlined, as well as the struggles that are more unique or greater to women than they are to men. Next, the concept of intersectionality will briefly be broken down and examined in relation to African American women. Chapter 3 will discuss the specific methodology used in the current study. This will include research design justification, process of recruitment, and demographics of the participants used. Following, Chapter 4 will discuss the findings of the present study and the researcher’s interpretation of the interviews. Lastly, Chapter 5 will conclude the study, analyzing the themes of the findings together and with the existing literature. Limitations of the current study will follow.

Chapter 2 - Reentry

Reentry is the release of prisoners back into the community (Visser & Travis, 2011).

The main challenge of this process is learning how to aid an ex-prisoner's transition from prison back to regular life - what here is referred to as being a productive, functioning citizen (Travis, Solomon, & Waul, 2001). In past decades, the prisoner reentry population has increased (Visser & Travis, 2011). This emphasizes the significance of understanding what contributes to successful reentry. As stated by Visser and Travis (2011), "more people are coming home because more people are sent to prison," (p. 103). Being that mass incarceration is so prevalent, frequent release is inevitable. Unsuccessful reentry will only increase issues within society and the criminal justice system.

It is important to assess what makes an individual's reentry successful, versus what makes an individual's reentry unsuccessful. This is important because if successful reentry is not understood, then individuals who have been incarcerated are more likely to be involved in an endless cycle of criminal involvement. In regards to successful reentry, there is currently no defined concept that determines what successful reentry is. Some individuals study successful reentry over set time periods such as three years, whereas some individuals study successfully reentry over shorter periods such as one year or even three months (Hlavka, Wheelock, & Jones, 2015; Bahr, Harris, Fisher, & Armstrong, 2010; Polaschek, Yesberg, & Chauhan, 2018; O'Brien, 2001).

Based upon previous literature, the concept of "successfully reentering" has been interpreted based on the perception of the researchers who have orchestrated studies relating to the topic. Some researchers measure successfully reentry based on their personal views. Other researchers have measured successful reentry based on the views of their participants'. A study

conducted by Heidemann, Cederbaum, and Martinez (2016), found that women defined successful reentry with five main themes: 1) having their own place, 2) helping family and others, 3) living free from criminal involvement, 4) persevering despite challenges, and 5) living what is considered a “normal life”. O’Brien (2001) found that five major themes shared among women’s perception of successful reentry included: 1) finding a living space, 2) acquiring legal income, 3) rebuilding connections with others, 4) engaging in the community and community memberships, and 5) building confidence in oneself. An example of a completely different stance on success is that of Bahr, Harris, Fisher, and Armstrong (2010), who viewed successful reentry within their study as successful completion and discharge from parole. Despite successful reentry being defined in many different ways, all of the different interpretations are still adequate understandings of what successful reentry is. In spite of the fluidity of interpretations, the different interpretations of successful reentry among researchers exemplify the vagueness of the term “success” when related to reentry.

Previous literature has focused a great deal on deficit or risk based approaches in order to better understand reentry and recidivism (Schlager, 2018). Schlager (2018) suggests that a good approach to better facilitate reentry amongst ex-prisoners is by shifting the focus from risk-based or deficit-focused approach to a strengths-based approach or solution-focused model. This method is believed to encourage offenders by emphasizing their positive qualities, rather than emphasizing their weaknesses. Strength based approaches are described by Schlager (2018) as life-affirming, empowering, and proactive. Although, the strength-based perspective has been implemented and proven as successful in social work, the criminal justice system has not yet implemented such practices widely (Schlager, 2018). According to researchers like Schlager, a positive view of one’s journey can positively reinforce behavior. Based on this approach, the

only requirement for the participants of this study to be considered successful was simply refraining from crime after release from prison. This encourages a positive self-concept and increases the chances of a successful reentry and desistance from crime.

Barriers to Reentry

Barriers to reentry are obstacles that interfere with individuals returning home after incarceration. Post-incarceration, there are number of barriers individuals released from prison will have to overcome, in order to become functioning individual in society. Some of the barriers that individuals released from prison are immediately faced with upon release are obtaining housing, transportation, and finances. Other barriers that have been identified as difficult to overcome when reentering are mental and physical health issues, substance abuse issues, and lack of social support (Schlager, 2018; Bahr et al., 2010; Angell, Matthews, Barrenger, Watson, & Draine, 2014; O'Brien, 2003). In addition to the main barriers faced by ex-offenders returning to society, typically, ex-offenders are also returning to communities that suffer from underprivileged schools, weak labor markets, and less fortunate healthcare options (Visher & Travis, 2011). Visher and Travis (2011) estimate that more than 2 out of 3 ex-offenders will be rearrested and 1 out of 2 prisoners will be re-incarcerated within 3 years after being released from prison. The specific barriers that will be discussed in the following sections are substance abuse, health, housing, transportation, employment/finances, education, and social support.

Substance Abuse

Drug use has been identified as one major risk factor for ex-prisoners during reentry. Approximately 60% of the state prisoners appeared to suffer from drug dependence or substance abuse issues between 2007 and 2009 (Bronson, Stroop, Zimmer, Berzofsky, 2017). In fact, Bahr

and colleagues (2010) suggest that substance abuse is a key factor in whether parolees return to prison, regardless of whether their initial crime was a drug crime. Due to this, it is important to understand and prevent substance abuse early on during the reentry phase. In a survey conducted by Luther, Reichart, Holloway, Roth, and Aalsma (2011), it was found that many individuals relapse into substance abuse almost immediately after reentry; some explaining how their first drug of choice upon release was crack cocaine, even after participating in more than one drug program. This displays a clear issue with effective rehabilitation amongst offenders while incarcerated.

Previous studies have provided many different suggestions for diminishing the prevalence of substance abuse among ex-prisoners. Sung, Linda, and Richter (2006) found that punishment and treatment work best together and offenders are more successful at desisting from crime when they participate in both. It was discovered in a different study that being unable to obtain adequate housing upon reentry increases the likelihood of ex-offenders relapsing into addiction, even if treatment was successful during incarceration; adequate housing has been described by female inmates as both secure and supported (Ahmed, Angel, Martell, Pyne, & Keenan, 2016). Alternatively, when secured and supported housing is successfully obtained, the risk of relapse declines (Ahmed et al., 2016).

Bahr et al. (2010) examined the effect that drug treatment programs have on criminal justice involved individuals, he explained that it is possible that drug treatment programs and criminal justice involved individuals' self-concept or self-efficacy may be the main factor that encourages the change in behavior amongst parolees with substance abuse problems. Increasing one's beliefs and views of themselves appeared to have a significant impact on the success of one's reentry, whereas parolees who display lower confidence levels are more at risk for

recidivism (Bahr et al., 2010). This supports the findings of Schlager (2018), that a better concept of oneself becomes empowering for individuals and increases the likelihood of success (Schlager, 2018). Ex-offenders involved in drug treatment programs who have a more positive self-image are more likely to successfully refrain from drug use. Although treatment programs offered in prisons may be sufficient learning tools for inmates, it is important that the needs of individuals who have been incarcerated are still assessed and understood post-incarceration.

Health/Mental Health

Reentry into the community poses a great risk to offenders' safety and health (Angell et al., 2014). Research found that in state prisons, 73% of women and 55% of men suffered from mental health issues (Arditi & Few, 2008). Somers, Rezansoff, Moniruzzaman, and Zabarauckas (2015), found that out of individuals who served the highest number of days in prison or the highest number of days under community supervision, 99% of both groups were diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder while 4 out of 5 of them suffered from both a mental disorder and a substance abuse disorder. In comparison, while observing the general offending population, 41% had never been diagnosed with any mental health issues; meaning more than half had been diagnosed with mental health problems (Somers et al., 2015). Suffering from mental illness can cause issues such as inadequate risk assessments and social exclusion from communities as a result of discrimination (Matejkowski et al., 2011). Understanding the high rates of mental health issues among ex-prisoners and its impact, demonstrates the need for attention to this subject.

While there are a number of programs and services that assist with mental and physical health issues for members of the community, ex-prisoners who are homeless are often unable to access them (Bunn, 2018). This is described by Bunn (2018) as facilitating ex-prisoners'

pathways back into criminalization, by overlooking their specific needs. When health becomes an issue for anyone, regardless of offending status, it can become quite a large expense; this can leave ex-prisoners in an extremely difficult financial state. Following release from prison, finances are typically low and finding a steady income is an obstacle. This leaves little to no funds to support health programs or services.

According to Angell et al. (2014) engagement is a key element in aiding to the mental health among individuals reentering. This means that ensuring frequent communication between clients and service providers is beneficial. Some strategies that have been enforced to help resolve problematic matters regarding mental health issues in reentry include calling or sending letters to ex-offenders, in order to increase appointment participation and attendance and provide positive reinforcement through praising offenders for their diligence within programs (Angell et al., 2014). Strategies regarding engagement encourage client participation and encourage the pursuit of life goals and treatments (Angell et al., 2014). Positively reinforcing good behavior can help to remind the client that the ultimate goal is success, which is what programs want to cultivate. On the other hand, relational strategies encourage a bond between programs and clients; this can include resolving participation barriers and decreasing hesitance among clients (Angell et al., 2014). In regards to mental health, encouraging relationships among clients and programs helps build trust.

Housing

One of the most important factors of reentry is obtaining housing. Studies show that a number of offenders returning home are either living in disadvantaged communities or are homeless (Visher, LaVigne, & Travis, 2004). As an individual returning from prison, there is typically a stigma associated with a criminal record. This creates critical barriers and limitations

when trying to obtain a stable and secure living environment (Keene, Smoyer, & Blankenship, 2018). Stigma can impact individuals released from prison when trying to rent from private home-owners. Stigma can also prevent individuals returning from prison from obtaining subsidized housing - due to policies preventing felons from being eligible for the benefit (Keene et al., 2018).

Not only do criminal records and stigmas impact ex-offenders' capabilities of obtaining a home, but credit histories also tend to impact their abilities of obtaining a home (Ahmed et al., 2016). In addition to pressing issues regarding stigma, affordability is also a major issue when ex-prisoners are faced with the obstacle of finding a home (Keene et al., 2018). According to Aurand, Emmanuel, Yentel, Errico, and Pang (2017), there was no state where housing could be afforded with minimum wage, full-time work; understanding both this and the struggle that ex-prisoners face when trying to find substantial work, emphasizes the difficulty that ex-prisoners have providing a home for themselves and their families.

Without having a place to live, whether it be a halfway house, with family, friends, or other alternatives, ex-offenders are forced to stay in shelters or be homeless. Luther et al. (2011) found several different issues among their participants when regarding housing; some ex-offenders made housing arrangements prior to being released that were unsuccessful, some did not have the resources necessary to maintain a residence post release, some had friends or family who agreed to house them prior to release but changed their minds later, and some just never made any solidified housing arrangements before being released. As a result, many individuals resorted to illegal activities, like prostitution in order to support themselves financially; some individuals also had to resort to communicating with old acquaintances for housing – both alternatives usually led them back into criminal activity (Luther et al., 2011).

O'Brien (2001) found that one woman, who successfully reentered, described transitional housing as a major component to her success; this allowed her to support herself independently and not have to rely on family or friends for shelter post incarceration, because she had time to get on her feet. Some women lived with different people temporarily, until they had enough money to make a more independent move for themselves; other women saved money obtained while working in prison (O'Brien, 2001). All of these options demonstrate how difficult it can be for ex-offenders to obtain housing. This insinuates that prisons may need to reinforce housing requirements prior to the release of offenders. Possible policy implications could be making transitional housing a requirement or ensuring that ex-prisoners have a place to live once released.

It is suggested that stable housing improves quality of life for individuals released from prison. Chintakrindi, Porter, Kim, and Gupta (2015) found that there is a significant relationship between stable housing and employment; this means that stable housing is a vital factor in securing employment. The correlation between stable housing and employment means that a lack of stable housing can also greatly increase the risk of recidivism, due to ex-offenders lacking a stable income (Ahmed et al., 2016). In addition, housing is a factor that is suggested to negatively impact health upon reentry; alternatively, obtaining good housing positively impacts one's health (Ahmed et al., 2016). This demonstrates the importance that stable housing has and it also exemplifies the contradictory circumstance of needing finances to obtain a home and needing a home to keep a steady job. Keeping steady employment is often difficult when an individual has high residential mobility. Housing impacts so many other factors of individuals' lives when reentering; it can often act as pivotal point that either greatly increases or decreases individuals chances of succeeding post-incarceration.

Transportation

Transportation can appear as a miniscule factor of successful reentry initially, but being able to adequately travel to work, the parole office, treatment, and other important destinations is a necessity. Dependable transportation has been described as owning an automobile, having the ability to walk or bike to important destinations, or having affordable public transportation nearby (Bohmert, 2016). Transportation has been described as one of the main challenges women parolees are faced with during reentry (Johnson, 2014). For women, getting to treatments and programs tends to be harder due to the fact that there are less programs available to them geographically; this is largely because they have had less involvement in the criminal justice system when compared to their male counterparts (Bohmert, 2016). Limited transportation can be problematic for parolees because it makes it harder for them to keep jobs, meet conditions of parole (such as community service, check ins, etc.), and consistently participate in treatment.

While a lack of transportation can be viewed as a limitation to successful reentry, it has also been found that a number of parolees feel that limited movement can be beneficial to successful reentry (Johnson, 2014). Limited movement, according to Johnson (2014), is described as only going places that are absolutely necessary; this can be beneficial because it limits contacts to old criminal peers, as well as diminishes the risk of engaging in criminal behavior. This can be contradictory being that transportation is needed in order to successfully meet parole conditions, but can limit criminal activity due to limiting the parolees/probationers accessibility to criminal activity and/or criminal justice involved peers.

Employment/Finances

Finding employment is a crucial factor to successful reentry; typically, securing employment is even a condition of parole (Bahr et al., 2010; Seiter, 2003). This is problematic during the process of reentry because lack of employment can greatly increase financial stress. In addition, as long as employment is a condition of parole, ex-offenders are obligated to find employment in order to not be rearrested for violation of parole. The stigma that is attached to being an ex-offender limits beneficial employment opportunities for individuals released from prison (Tyler & Brockmann, 2017). Without good employment that offers a livable wage, ex-offenders have few ways to make income before resorting back to crime in order to make money.

Usually, it is suggested that ex-prisoners who obtain stable employment have an easier time adjusting to society post-release than those who have not secured employment (Immarigeon & Maruna, 2004). Securing employment post-release has been considered one of the best predictors of successful desistance regardless of an offender's race (Lockwood, Nally, & Ho, 2016). It is likely that this could be a result of an increase in finances and pro-social bonds. This means that individuals reentering are more secure in their finances and have more pro-social relationships that give them a reason to desist from crime.

Sung et al. (2006) found that ex-prisoners were more successful at desisting from crime when there were more jobs available and the unemployment rate was low. With all other factors remaining the same, ex-offenders' likelihood of being re-arrested increased by almost 50% with a one-point increase in unemployment rates (Sung et al., 2006). This means that while it is important to teach "job readiness" to individuals released from prison, it is equally as important to have a friendly job labor market so jobs can be available to them. This emphasizes the need for business incentives that encourage the employment of ex-offenders. Individuals released

from prison may have a desire to be law-abiding citizens, but there is only so much that can be done when opportunities are not readily available to them.

The skill-level of individuals released from prison is a factor that should be considered when determining whether employment is likely for them. Individuals returning from prison typically demonstrate a lack of marketable skills and insufficient employment history (Bahr et al., 2010). Accordingly, some studies demonstrate that a large number of participants obtained most of their employment opportunities through connections – whether those connections were family, friends, associates, or programs created to facilitate reentry (O’Brien, 2001; Hlavka et al., 2015). This suggests that it may be more difficult for individuals released from prison who have limited pro-social connections or limited social skills to obtain a job.

Hlavka et al. (2015) found that some individuals returning from prison described the stigma attached with being an ex-prisoner as a helpful factor when trying to obtain jobs and opportunities that are community based and focus on outreach. On the other hand, some ex-offenders fear the conditions of parole and laws that ensure employer acknowledgement of criminal history because of the belief it would prevent them from securing a number of job opportunities (O’Brien, 2001). These differences demonstrate how ex-offenders may have different experiences as a result of their criminal records. While some individuals are able to use their “ex-offender label” to their advantage and work with support groups to be a form of encouragement to other individuals returning to society, others feel that their criminal record will prohibit them from securing employment prematurely.

Education

Education has not been found to have a significant impact on recidivism, but it has been found to have a significant impact on obtaining meaningful employment (Lockwood et al.,

2016). When considering education and crime, it was found that most criminals who recidivate are typically younger, ex-offenders who have an education that is below high school; about three out of four African American offenders were likely to recidivate, while about seven out of ten Caucasians were likely to recidivate who had an education below high school, were under the age of 30, and who were unable to obtain stable employment (Lockwood et al., 2016). Scott (2016) sought to better understand the connection between education and recidivism for African American males; it was found that the common theme of obtaining stability was the central focus amongst the group. This demonstrates the possibility that while education is an important role in job marketability, some criminal justice involved individuals may struggle with acknowledging the importance of education and learning vital marketable skills in order to successfully achieve their desired stability.

It is recommended that educational opportunities available to offenders while incarcerated extend to individuals released from prison (Lockwood et al., 2016). Despite prior studies suggesting that educational achievement does not necessarily decrease recidivism, educational programs have been found to increase education achievement scores (Seiter & Kadela, 2003). Interestingly enough, Hlavaka et al. (2015), found that one participant explained how education had a lot to do with his reentry. At the time of the study he was a mentor to other individuals released from prison and desired to help individuals overcome the process of reentry like he did; although giving advice takes motivation and determination, in his opinion education was a vital part of successfully leading others (Hlavaka et al., 2015).

Social Support

Social support amongst ex-prisoners can be an underrated barrier in regards to reentry. In some studies, it was found that even if all participants were unable to find full time work, a large

majority of participants received some form of assistance from family or other community members in the early stages of reentry (O'Brien, 2001). It is important to understand the different types of social support available in order to understand the different ways social support can be provided to individuals reentering. In most studies discussed up to this point, individuals released from prison acknowledge the help they received from friends or family when in need of housing, finances, transportation, or encouragement in general (O'Brien, 2001; Luther et al., 2011; Bahr et al., 2010).

According to Johnson (2014), family ties have a beneficial impact on women parolees. During a series of semi-structured interviews conducted by Johnson, family support was often incorporated in answers that did not even ask about family support. Family support was viewed as necessary in obtaining parole success (Johnson, 2014). Alternatively, it is important to consider the impact that lost time with family can have on individuals released from prison. Hlavaka et al. (2015) found that the absence of family typically led to ex-prisoners to focus a great deal of their time on reuniting with family members and making up for lost time. Furthermore, the impact of being separated from children encouraged ex-prisoners to succeed at reentering and refrain from re-offending; after attempting to raise their children from prison, most ex-prisoners were driven to do everything possible to prevent their family from going through such strain again (Hlavaka et al., 2015).

Family members also have been viewed as “protective covers”; this means that family members may accompany parolees outside of the home, providing individuals with a guardian when they did not trust themselves to remain clean on their own (Johnson, 2014). The idea of family members being “protective covers” relates back to the concept of ex-prisoners being less likely to commit crime when they have limited access to transportation (Johnson, 2014). This

concept can also be compared to the ideas behind routine activity theory. Routine activity theorists argue that criminal activity is more likely to occur based upon how three elements work together: 1) motivated offender, 2) suitable target, and 3) capable guardian (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Whether or not a capable guardian is present is defined as a more critical preventative method of crime, because it is assumed there are always suitable targets and motivated offenders (Cohen & Felson, 1979). In comparison to Johnson (2014), family members act as the capable guardian or “protective cover” for individuals returning from prison. Alternatively, the impact of having social ties and bonds with criminal family members may be counteractive to successful reentry and should also be considered.

Women and Reentry

In general, women tend to have different experiences in life than men; because of this, the experiences and struggles that women face in the criminal justice system and during reentry also may differ. This is important because subsequently, the needs of women may differ from those of men as well. As a result of historically higher rates of male incarceration, most reentry programs and policies have focused on the needs of men, overlooking the many unique needs of women (Spjeldnes and Goodkind, 2009; Bohmert, 2016). To an extent, gender has been ignored, which has negatively impacted the experiences of women within the criminal justice system. Despite the rate of women offenders in the United States increasing, public policy has still neglected to support the many needs of women (Bloom, Owen, and Covington, 2003).

One issues that need to be considered is the gender differences in pathways to offending. Understanding these important differences can help aid in what can be done to better support the transition from prison to society among women. The War On Drugs has created many issues for women and has created a much more severe amount of punishment for women in comparison to

how much harm they truly cause society (Bloom et al., 2003). Unlike men, women are more likely to be convicted for drug crimes or property offenses, whereas men are more likely to be convicted for violent offenses (Bloom et al., 2003). Reynolds (2008) suggests that as a result of mandatory sentencing and drug laws implemented to help minimize drug crimes across the nation, drug laws and policy implications need to be reconsidered due to the negative impact they have had on both mass incarceration and rates of women imprisonment. It is suggested that the conditions of women's involvement and initiation with drug crimes needs to be considered during sentencing, which is not possible due to laws prohibiting the admission of differentiating factors that go into committing crime.

The impact that the War on Drugs has left on women in society has been so severe, that some even refer to it as the "War on Women" (Stringer, 2009). It is also suggested that the War on Drugs has disproportionately impacted women of color (Bloom et al., 2003; Reynolds, 2008; Spjeldnes and Goodkind; 2009). The impact the that War on Drugs has had on the non-violent, female community should not be overlooked. Although incarceration may decrease drug use for a limited time, a large number of women have become labeled as offenders or felons as a result of a non-violent offense.

In addition to reasons behind conviction, women have a vital role in family matters. More than half of the women in both state and federal prisons have an average of two minor children (Bloom et al., 2004). Despite the fact that both men and women parent children, the parental role assumed typically differs depending on gender. While women are likely to have higher levels of responsibilities for children, they also are more likely to have responsibilities that involve other family members as well (Bloom et al., 2004). This supports the societal norm of America that emphasize the woman's role as being the caregiver to the family.

A 2002 study found that more than half of incarcerated women reported that they had been sexually abused prior to incarceration (James 2004). It has also been found that women are more susceptible to staff misconduct or re-victimization (Bloom et al., 2004). Further, women in prisons are 34% more likely to carry HIV or AIDS than males (Maruschak, 2008), increasing concerns about both physical health issues and health expenses. The impact that all of these factors have on the mental health of women is also something that should be considered.

Furthermore, a lack of adequate programs for women geographically has put a significant burden on women in regards to transportation (Bohmert, 2016). Programs need to be just as accessible to women as they are to men. Additionally, accommodations should also be made for parolees/probationers who act as primary caregivers to their children, especially if they are a single parent. Overall, as women are returning to their communities, typically they are returning to environments where they face a number of disadvantages, as well as marginalization; all of the factors discussed only add to the uphill battle that reentry is alone (Johnson, 2014).

Cultural Mistrust

Taylor, Biafora, and Warheit (1994) conducted a study that examined cultural mistrust among African American boys and how it related to their willingness to engage in criminal behavior; it was found that the feeling of mistrust made it more likely that an individual would violate both social norms and laws. Furthermore, Gabbidon and Unnever (2016) assert that there is a direct relationship between offenses made by African Americans and the racial injustices they face. The basis of Gabbidon and Unnever's (2016) African American Theory of Offending is that due to years of oppression, African Americans developed a "unique racial lens" that has shaped both their behavior and beliefs. In testing said theory, Gabbidon and Unnever (2016) found their hypotheses to be true; African Americans who experience more racial discrimination

are more likely to offend. Link and Oser (2018) studied the relationship between stressors and criminal thinking among African American women and found that while women on probation reported higher levels of cultural mistrust and criminal thinking, spirituality had a negative relationship with cultural mistrust, reducing criminal thinking.

Pursuant to the discussed studies, it is important to understand the impact that cultural mistrust has on successful reentry after incarceration. It is important to consider the concept of mistrust and how it impacts all aspects of criminal justice system. Further examination of cultural mistrust can strengthen the arguments made by researchers such as Gabbidon and Unnever and provide incentive for policy that can help to rebuild trust within communities that suffer from cultural mistrust. This could assist with improving the criminal justice system by encouraging positive relationships between criminal justice involved individuals and authorities.

Intersectionality

Gender and race are two key factors in this study. Examining how the intersectionality of being both African American and a woman has impacts successful reentry after prison is the goal of the current study. The concept of intersectionality was first discussed in a study on the impact of race and gender on employment among African American women (Crenshaw, 1991). It is suggested that categorization of cultures can be an indicator of things such as power demonstration; the people who hold more power, typically are responsible for customs and norms within the culture (Risberg & Pilhofer, 2018). For instance, women usually suffer from a decrease in pay over time due to the parental role that they usually assume (Calasanti & Giles, 2018). When considering race, African American individuals usually have lower earnings than individuals who are white because of the types of jobs they receive (Calasanti & Giles, 2018). Subsequently, this places African American women in a position that, by default, has a number

of disadvantages. Since African American women are in a disadvantaged position, it is important to understand complexities and differences that may come along with being an African American woman during the reentry process, if any.

Purpose of Study

The objective of this research is to determine what factors best facilitate successful reentry among the female, African American community. Since reentry has been a widely studied topic, the goal of this research is to focus on reentry in relation to African American women and identify if there are unique attributes that emerge from their success stories. The current study is qualitative and will gather data through a series of one-on-one interviews.

Interviews are an appropriate research method this study design for two primary reasons:

1. The participants are able to discuss their reentry journey's in their own words. This allows participants to provide as much detail as they want in an attempt to adequately share their experience reentering.
2. The participants are able to share exactly "how" they reentered. This could have been completed with quantitative research, but as discussed, the participants are able to thoroughly explain their responses and provide first hand insight.

The following research questions guide the current study:

Research question 1: What barrier(s) pose the most/least influence on successful reentry?

Research question 2: What was viewed as the most difficult part of reentry and how was it overcome?

Research question 4: What outlying factors are common among the group, if any?

Research question 5: What role does cultural mistrust play before and after incarceration, if any?

Chapter 3 - Methods

The purpose of this study is to offer inductive research that can aid in the research of reentry and African American women. This is achieved through qualitative research examining the stories of a number of women who have successfully reentered, and analyzing their perceptions of common barriers discussed in the existing literature. The data collection process consisted of a series of interviews conducted by one interviewer. Constructivist grounded theory methods were used in order to obtain and analyze the data. Family, community service members, housing, education, employment, finances, transportation, mental health, substance use, spirituality, cultural mistrust, and the definition of “success” in regards to the reentry process were the main topics examined throughout the duration of this research.

Research Design and Design Justification

Grounded Theory Methods

Grounded theory methods (GTM) has been described as a preclusive stage to research; this has been described as the development of theories and hypotheses from data that has been collected unbiasedly (Engward, 2013). In order to genuinely understand any phenomena, there has to be unbiased steps taken to gather and analyze data in order to form a theory that can accurately described common patterns found throughout the data. Grounded theory methods allows for systematic, yet flexible, analysis of qualitative data (Charmaz, 2014). Different components of grounded theory methods have been identified as openness, immediate analysis, coding and continuous comparison, memo writing, theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation, and production of substantive theory (Engward, 2013).

Although grounded theory methods can be interpreted and applied in various ways, there are some key components that coincide with almost all interpretations of GTM. Since data can

easily be skewed by opinions of researchers being placed upon existing phenomena, openness is described as a major component of grounded theory methods (Engward, 2013); this because it is important to be unbiased while conducting researching. Immediate analysis is also a necessary component to better facilitate theoretical sampling (Engward, 2013). Coding and continuous comparison refers to breaking data down into subparts, in order to better compare findings across data collected (Engward, 2013). Memo writing used to ensure a record of the researchers progressing thoughts as different cases or events are studied (Engward, 2013). Theoretical sampling is when theory design begins and the researcher is able to suggest relationships or raise additional questions that may be pertinent to filling gaps and clarifying ambiguities in order to build emerging theory (Engward, 2013). Theoretical saturation is ensured once no new information is emerging from participants; this step is necessary in order to limit limitations and unanswered questions involving the emerging theory (Engward, 2013). Finally, the last step is production of a substantive theory, which is a set of ideas and concepts that relate cohesively, but remains fallible (Engward, 2013).

Charmaz (2014) describes her constructivist approach to grounded theory methods as a way to describe the constant evolution of theories; this is because researchers are naturally subjective to perceptions and viewpoints. This means that although theories and hypotheses may form from research and data that is collected and analyzed, other researchers may continue to build on or find completely different emerging theories based on different research techniques and individualism. Charmaz (2014) emphasizes the role of subjectivity and how it is not possible to separate the trait from social existence. Charmaz (2017) steers away from the pragmatic approach of grounded theory methods by studying the process, seeking multiple perspectives, paying analytical attention to language, studying emergent meanings and actions,

providing methods for theorizing actions, offering tools to study temporality, and providing a method for critical inquiry. Alternatively, the pragmatic approach of grounded theory methods assumes the process, acknowledges multiple perspectives, emphasizes the significance of language, sees meanings and actions as emergent and as affecting each other, provides the roots of a theory of action, takes temporality into account, unites the viewer with the viewed, and advocates social reform (Charmaz, 2017). Here, the goal is to create a concept that can act as a starting point to future research, not to proclaim that these findings are the answer to the phenomenon at hand. In doing so, constructivist grounded theory methods acts as a foundation to either build upon with additional studies.

One benefit of qualitative data is that existing research can always be enhanced through its use; entirely new concepts can even emerge while data are still being collected (Charmaz, 2014). Qualitative data allows the research to remain flexible to ideas and concepts throughout the research and data collection process. The methods and ideologies that make up grounded theory methods are vital to the research at hand. Even more so, the concepts that align with constructivist grounded theory methods mirror the exact purpose of this study. This is beneficial to the current study because the goal of this study is to create an *interpretive* portrayal of an understudied population and how they successfully conquer reentry, which is currently a pressing matter in society given the impact of mass incarceration. As explained by Charmaz (2014), the results of this study will examine the past, explore the present, and advocate for the future - by interpreting the data collected rather than simply reiterating the information found throughout the study.

Inductive analysis allows the opportunity to analyze data as it is collected. This is beneficial to the research at hand because the focus is to discover resemblances and relationships

amongst the stories being told. By utilizing Grounded Theories method, once the data are reviewed, the researcher is able to relate the findings to a theory that was established prior and modify it to fit the topic being studied (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Alternatively, the researcher may not discover any comparisons among the data collected and theories that were established prior; this allows the opportunity for the researcher to formulate their own conclusions based on their findings, if they appear to have some significance (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

Design Justification

Theories are not permanent and allow constant evolution. This is necessary because circumstances change. While findings may be fitting for certain eras and certain societies the world is constantly evolving, resulting in different phenomena and social structures. The concept of constructivist grounded theory methods in this study is fitting for a number of reasons: 1) this study is examining a understudied group among the reentry population, and it is attempting to expand the understanding of how barriers are dealt with among the group, 2) the goal of the study is not to confirm or deny any prior studies or theories, instead the goal is to uncover and understand specific experiences, 3) this study collected data by using open-ended interviews to facilitate genuine responses by participants, and it notes key attributes through the process of memo writing, while utilizing an interview outline that assists with generating discussion regarding barriers that have been defined in existing literature, 4) concepts can be added once the data collection process starts. This is why constant analysis is necessary, it allows additional questions to be answered throughout all stages of the data collection process.

There were several steps taken throughout the study to ensure thorough and accurate findings. With the permission of the participants, all of the interviews were audio recorded. Of the nine interviews completed, five of the recordings were transcribed by the researcher and four

were transcribed by a trusted transcription company. Once transcribed, every interview was reviewed and coded based off of either the guidance of the interview outline or pertinent topics that emerged in the participants' answers without being prompted. For example, some participants may have only discussed relationships with family members once prompted by a specific interview statements such as, "Tell me about your family." Whereas other participants may have discussed their relationships with family members when prompted by, "Tell me about your story." Acknowledging the different ways that key themes emerged throughout interviews allows the interviewer to gauge how important different topics were to participants, as well as gain insight on other topics that may have not been explored had they not been specifically brought up by participants.

Following the coding process, themes were reviewed and organized. This consisted of identifying common themes discussed by participants, or in some incidents, what the researcher viewed as important themes. Then, significant quotes were identified to illustrate overall findings within each theme. Lastly, different themes were analyzed in relation to one another. This provided the ability to create a "formula" to better describe and summarize what all led to successful reentry among the participants of this study.

Recruitment

Recruitment was rather strenuous throughout the duration of the study. After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board of Kennesaw State University, a total of 15 plus organizations and programs were contacted between March 2018 and June 2018 by the researcher. The facilities and programs contacted consisted of reentry support groups, African American coalition groups, and criminal justice coalition organizations. Additional programs were contacted second hand as a result of initial contact, and provided with the researcher's

information. All of the programs and organizations contacted were located in Georgia; more specifically, they were located in the Greater Atlanta area. A flyer was created and submitted when the study was initially pitched to each organization. The flyers outlined the purpose of the study and the qualifications required in order to participate in the study. The study proposal was pitched to the organizer of Zion Baptist Church Social Justice Coalition. Subsequently, a coordinator for Cobb County's Department of Supervision was contacted and connected the researcher with a member of the organization "Impact," which provided the first volunteer for the study. Typically, one to two additional participants were obtained through each participant interviewed. The participants would reach out to friends and acquaintances, and provide the researcher with their contact – if they expressed a desire to participate. The goal was to have at least 12 women participate; there were 9 participants total. Prior to the commencement of interviews, informed consent forms were reviewed and signed by each participant.

Participants

There were a total of nine participants, all of which were incarcerated for federal crimes from any where between two and fifteen years. There were no geographical limits set for who could participate in this study. Despite this, all of the women were incarcerated in Georgia. Education levels amongst participants ranged from High-School Diploma/GED to Bachelor's Degree. At the time of the study, seven of the participants were employed full time. Three of the seven participants had more than one job, one owned their own business, and one was retired looking for part-time employment. Of all of the participants, only one participant identified with having a substance abuse issue, which was prior to her successful reentry. All but one of the women were first-time offenders, meaning for all but one of the women, they were only caught

and convicted of a federal crime one time. Only two of the nine women did not have children.

Additionally, only two women did not go to transitional housing prior to reentering.

Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria

Participants of this study were required to be an African American woman, at least twenty-nine years or older, who were incarcerated for at least one (1) year as a result of a felony.

The participants were not required to be out of prison for a specified amount of time; this allowed participants to fully demonstrate their perception of successfully reentry. It was assured that all participants met the qualifications described through a preliminary interview with the researcher. If participants did not meet the inclusion criteria, then they were excluded from the study.

Nickname	Age	Offense	Charge	Time Spent Incarcerated (years)	Children	Relationship	Education Level	Transitional Housing
Carol	50	1st	Embezzlement	2	4	Single	Some College	Yes
Trina	42	1st	Voluntary Manslaughter	12	2	Engaged	Some College	Yes
Chartisia	38	1st	Armed Robbery	15	3	Married	GED	Yes
Lo	37	1st	Drug Trafficking	7	1	Divorcing	Some College	No
E.	32	1st	Drug Trafficking	7	3	Single	GED	Yes
Tip	29	1st	Aggravated Assault	2	2	Single	Unclear	Yes
Chanel	31	1st	Bank Robbery	2	0	Partner	Some College	No
Candice	35	2nd	Identity Theft	4	6	Married	Some College	Yes
Danie	65	1st	Bank Robbery	10	0	Single	Bachelor's Degree	Yes

Measures

Family, community service members, housing, education, employment, finances, transportation, mental health, substance use, spirituality, cultural mistrust, and the definition of “success” in regard to reentry were the factors measured through the interviews conducted.

There was an outline of open-ended questions that encouraged responses to discuss the main points listed above. In addition to the open-ended questions, there were also demographic questions asked for the purpose of better understanding the participants. Initially, the only concepts focused on during the interview process with open-ended questions were support from family, finances, community service provider support, transportation, employment, education, and spirituality. After the eighth interview, it was determined that it would be beneficial to emphasize the participants living situation and process of obtaining a home through the use of open-ended questions as well, and not just the demographic questions. This was decided because although every interview eventually led to the discussion of housing, it seemed there could be more emphasis on the role that housing played during the reentry process.

Additionally, it also was decided that adding a question to determine how the participants defined successful reentry would be informative. It was believed that this would remove some of the additional analyzing that would be required to understand how their responses and situations equate to success for them. Following this decision, the question “what do you view as successful reentry?” was added to the interview. This demonstrates the reflexive nature of qualitative research. Demographic questions were provided to each participant following their qualitative interview. This ensured that the survey would not cause the interview to become too formal or impersonal prior to the qualitative portion of the interviews. The questions asked on the demographic questionnaire gave insight to age, marital status, children, living environment before and after prison, education level, job status before and after prison, and health.

Chapter 4 - Findings

As mentioned, the the following findings are based on the responses of the participants as well as the researcher's interpretation of the responses. The interviews ranged anywhere between twenty-five minutes and an hour and forty-five minutes. The barriers discussed are education, employment, finances, substance abuse, health, and social support. The additional factors discussed will be spirituality and cultural mistrust. To gain more insight regarding the experiences of the participants, they were also asked what they viewed as their biggest obstacle and what advice they would give to other African American women reentering.

Education

Education was viewed as important by many of the women. A number of women expressed their desire to obtain college degrees. All of the women had either a GED or high school diploma at the time of the study. Only one of the participants had an undergraduate degree. Despite this, seven out of nine of the participants had been to college post-incarceration. Most of the participants expressed the belief that obtaining a degree could benefit their careers goals. Some participants even expressed their desire to obtain a degree simply for their own personal satisfaction:

I have a desire to have a degree in business administration. And I'm determined, before I die, I close my eyes, to have that.

- Carol

In addition to desiring a degree to satisfy their own personal desires, some of the women desired degrees in order to advance in their career, or because they felt it was necessary for owning a private business:

It's just motivation because it has given me something to work forward to. Like now within my job I'm working on building up trust so hopefully, you know what I'm saying, once I get my degree, I can go to HR.

- Lo

My main goal is to own my own business - I just feel like at this age instead of working for other people, it's rough. But like I said, getting such a late start, well playing catch up, it seems like the only feasible answer for me is to get educated so that I could do some things.

- Trina

Going back to school was listed as a goal for many of the participants without being prompted. Unfortunately, like for Trina, a large portion of the women had to hold off on accomplishing this goal due to schedule conflicts with work. While school may be a big goal for a number of the women, the demand of work outweighs the desire for education:

School was [a goal] I thought I could tackle it and go to work, but being full-time and going to work is kind of hard. When you're getting off at 12 in the morning it's kind of rough because you got to get some sleep and then you got to get up to get back to school... I need to work more than I need to go to school.

- Trina

Although only one of the participants had actually completed college at the time of this study, the ambition and motivation that these women possessed towards going back to school is not something that should be dismissed. The only participant that had received a college degree, Danie, also expressed a desire to go back and get a second degree.

Courses and sessions offered during incarceration also demonstrated an impact on a few of the women's lives post-incarceration. While some women obtained their cosmetology licenses during incarceration, other women engaged in courses that benefited their mental health or strengthened their spirituality. One woman was able to learn coping methods for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and another woman was able to strengthen her spirituality with groups offered during her incarceration. Neither of the women discussed the courses in a manner that emphasized the impression that the course left on them, but both women gained valuable information that has aided to their lives outside of prison.

Two of the nine women confirmed that they went back to college and this was in reference to their cosmetology training, which was completed during their incarceration. Both women desired to start their own business. One expressed wanting to own a salon, and the other to sell hair-weaves. One participant, E, explained that although she became a certified cosmetologist during her time incarcerated, once she was released and tried to obtain a license through the state, she was unable due to her criminal record. Danie took courses in auto mechanics and electrical house wiring. She also obtained a certificate in advanced theology while incarcerated.

Employment

All but one of the participants were working during the time of the study. The participant who was not employed at the time of the study retired shortly after being released from prison. The women were working in a range of different jobs. Some of the women were even able to manage more than one job at a time. In spite of the women all obtaining jobs, approximately five out of the nine women discussed having some issue obtaining a job at one point or another during their reentry. One participant, Tip, discussed getting a position at Wendy's as a manager.

She disclosed her criminal background to the hiring manager, and she was still offered the position. Despite this, when human resources completed a background check, they explained they could not keep her:

I got the job at Wendy's as a general manager. He hired me as the general manager. I went through training and everything, and when they did a background check on me - which when I talked to the manager, I explained to him I was a convicted felon. I also explained to him what happened and what led up to me going to jail, but when the people at HR pulled my application and pulled my background check, they actually let me go because of my background.

- Tip

The example provided by Tip demonstrates that while hiring managers may be willing to hire ex-prisoners, cooperate policy can interfere with employment opportunities individuals with criminal records. Another participant described the process of looking for a job post-incarceration as the most depressing part of reentry:

I was home for probably like two weeks before I started looking for jobs, and I think that was probably the most depressing part because nobody hired anybody with any type of background. They don't ask me questions, they don't care, because I guess all they see on your background is the actual charge, so I probably got about four or five jobs... sometimes the background checks just come back slow... and I would be told like maybe two weeks or a week into starting the training or the new hire routine, that I had to be let go because my background had something on it.

- Chanel

Chanel's experience looking for employment during reentry is not unique to how many other individuals released from prison may feel. Barriers and stigmas have a direct impact on the employment process for ex-prisoners and can impact not only the motivation that an individual has while trying to reenter, but their mental health as well.

Three out of eight women's responses show that when factors such as stigma negatively impacted their ability to find a job. Alternatively, referrals and work history acted as a protective factor. Many women described how they were only able to obtain their first job once they had a referral by a friend, family member, or acquaintance. This not only highlights a resource that may be necessary for many returning prisoners to acquire a job, but also highlights the impact that support can have on ex-prisoners. Chanel and Lo explain how in spite of their difficulty to obtain a job originally, referrals were able to get them employment opportunities with ease:

It was pretty bad. I didn't have anything so I actually had like a bicycle and I was in Rome. I would just ride my bike into town because I was on like the outer part of town, and it's the downtown part where everything is. So I used to just get on my bike and just ride around and just apply everywhere, but I kept avoiding fast food restaurants... I never worked in fast food and I was just like I ain't working in no fast food, so then finally I rode my bike one day and I think I went to get something to eat or whatever and there was this girl in there, her name was Tyresha, she was just somebody who came back and forth on her college breaks and she was all like hey, we're hiring, you want to work here? I was like no, but then I was like okay and I went ahead and filled out the application. I filled out the application and I was talking to them and I ended up talking to the manager.

- Chanel

But it was kind of hard to get a job, because your background you know. So I went to get my cousin to talk with one of her friends and he ended up getting me a job. I did security. It didn't take any time. She just made the call like, "my cousin needs a job," and maybe within like a week, I had it.

- Lo

Chanel and Lo were only two of the three women who needed personal referrals to obtain a job after incarceration. Their process of obtaining employment post incarceration is significant because they are the only women in this study who did not go through transitional housing before they were released from prison. Transitional housing is a work release program that allows inmates to go to work before being released from prison. It appeared to be a very positive factor for all the women who had an opportunity to go through the program prior to release. Both Chanel and Lo are able to demonstrate what it takes to get a job without the extra assistance provided by participating in the program. Both women describe two very similar work related journeys.

Of the women, approximately seven out of nine went through transitional housing before being released from prison. Many of the women who went to transitional housing had, at the least, a job they could continue working in once they were released from prison. This option seemed to be extremely beneficial among this group of women. Candice and Carol explain:

I came home and I went back to McDonalds. [Then] I realized it's time to get somewhere else.

- Candice

I still had the job I was working while I was in the transitional center. I got a raise after I left prison. They gave me a raise. I continued to work there and I worked there. Then I decided I wanted another job.

- Carol

Transitional housing gave both of these women the opportunity to have a job immediately after incarceration and have time to make plans towards getting a job that would be more desirable in the future, without the added stress of not having an income.

Besides giving women job options that could withstand their time incarcerated, it prepared the women for the work world and gave them the opportunity to acquire work history. Trina is one of the women who actually continued working in the same field that she started in during her time at the transitional center. She has grown accustomed to working in restaurants, and she has been able to obtain additional jobs through networking. She explains her process of obtaining jobs within the restaurant field:

I would just go talk to a restaurant and explain to them that I have restaurant experience and in the restaurant industry we all kind of network with each other if we work together... I was working at Café Siargo one day and the next day I was [also] working here.

- Trina

Another participant has been promoted to Department Manager and the first assistant to the General Manager at the McDonald's where she is currently employed. She discusses how she did not want to work at McDonald's originally because that is where she was employed during the transitional center and she did not want to go back. Despite this, she proceeded to acknowledge her achievement of advancing within the company so quickly:

I went on a thousand interviews and filled out a thousand applications and no one hired me because I was a convicted felon, McDonald's was the only one that took me in. I mean it's great you know, I came in and got promoted so fast. I've been with this company almost three years and I've been the department manager for two years. I just got promoted to first assistant of the GM a little over six months ago.

- Tip

It is clear that opportunities provided by transitional housing are beneficial, but the financial benefit of the employment opportunities still need to be considered. While transitional housing may assist individuals being released from prison with obtaining employment, participants still demonstrated having issues with making enough income to live comfortably. With the limited job options available to all of the women, a few of the participants did express that although they are able to make ends meet, they are living paycheck to paycheck.

In sum, out of the women who went through transitional center, Trina and Tip are the only ones are still employed in the same line of work. All of the other women took different routes and found jobs that they felt were more suitable for them. At the time of the study two of women, Candice and Ebony, worked in hotels. Chartisia was able to open her own business selling oil lamps and other items, and Carol had two jobs working at a medical technical company and food depot at night.

Finances

Women who were able go through transitional center all had the opportunity save money before being released back into society. In fact, six out of seven of the women who participated in the transitional center were able to save their money and put it towards necessary expenses once they were released from prison. It was emphasized by one women:

No, when I came out, I had money. Coming out of the transitional center most people are going to have money unless they owe the state.

- Trina

Another woman explained how her time spent at the transitional center allowed her to save enough money to not only get an apartment secured before she was released, but to also pay three months of her rent as soon as she moved in:

So when I first got out April 2015 already had an apartment, already paid three months rent and I already had it. Everything situated.

- Carol

The additional finances that these women were able to save while incarceration alleviated much of the financial stress that they would have faced without it.

Despite the transitional center being a beneficial tool and helping many women accumulate a decent amount of savings prior to being released from prison, many women still discussed not having enough money to efficiently support themselves. Trina explained her financial situation as living paycheck to paycheck:

You pay your bills, go to work, pay your bills, go to work.

- Trina

She explained further, she returned a car to a dealership, because she was unable to maintain living expenses and a car note. She had to prioritize her expenses because her money was limited and other expenses were more important at the time:

It's just stuff like that that we have to learn so we don't get trapped in debt that can make us go out of our means. I want to jump fresh all the time, but guess what I cannot afford it. I can't afford to go buy a whole lot of stuff. I have to keep in mind that I have to try to

save my money. I don't have any health insurance you see what I'm saying those things are issues. You have to be smart about making decisions about your finances and about your life. And to me that was the biggest disappointment since I've been out I was just like oh my God. I'm 42 now I'm trying to build my credit. But it's stuff like that a lot of people don't know about. Their credit report or Credit Karma or credit score.

- Trina

Here, Trina demonstrates that she is good at managing money. She discusses that when she has felt like she needs more money, she has either requested additional hours to work from her job or she has obtained a second job.

Tip is another participant who had money saved from the transitional center. Despite having some savings, she also discussed the difficulty of providing for herself and her family as a single mother. Despite this, she has received raises and promotions within McDonald's, alleviating some of her financial stress. Despite wanting to ask friends or family for financial help at times, she refrained and made ends meet for her family:

No I didn't have to ask anyone for help. I mean there were times when I wanted to but I never did.

- Tip

Both of these examples demonstrate that determination and planning can be key to overcoming insufficient finances. Although the lifestyles the women are living may not be ideal to them, they have learned how to maintain and manage their finances. Despite the women not viewing this as a goal, their determination to make the best use of their available funds should be viewed as an accomplishment.

Three of the participants received monetary help from family and friends during reentry. Two of the three participants that had to receive financial assistance were the only two participants who did not have the opportunity to go to transitional housing, Lo and Chanel. This is significant and could mean that transitional housing can act as a protective factor for individuals who may not have family that can provide assistance to them. Both Lo and Chanel were able to receive financial support from family or friends until they were able secure employment.

Another participant, Danie, who has received financial assistance and went through transitional housing returned to her job after being released from prison as well. The biggest issue for her was that although she was able to keep the job, they only allowed her to work part-time. This did not allow her to make enough money. Also, due to health problems, she was unable to keep such a demanding job. Just two weeks prior to the interview with her, she stopped working at Wendy's and decided to live off of her Social Security. She has a desire to obtain a different job part time in order to bring in extra money for other miscellaneous expenses she may have. She explained that she receives a large amount of financial support from church ministries through gifts of food and bus fare, as well as through a romantic partner who helps her financially as well.

Substance Abuse

Substance abuse was not a prevalent issue among the group of women. Out of all of the women, only one woman identified with having a substance abuse issue. Candice suffered from her substance abuse issues prior to her time spent incarcerated. Although substance abuse has not been an issue for Candice since her first offense, she explained that she was unsure if relapse

could be an issue for her in the future. Initially she said she was not addicted to drugs or pills, but further into the interview she explained:

I'd say I wasn't addicted, but it was an addiction, because I remember when I started off popping one pill. Then one pill didn't do nothing, I'd do two and three. And then, finally I couldn't even get high off it more so here it is I'm trying to pop pills and drink a bunch of liquor at one time to get this feeling.

- Candice

Rather than drug treatment serving as a turning point from using drugs and excessive drinking, one of the incidents she was sent to prison for encouraged her decide to stop substance abuse all together. Candice was in an abusive relationship and the first offense she was charged with the assault of her abuser. Although he was not being abusive to her at the time the event happened, she explained, the influence the substances had on her mental state caused her to retaliate against him in the moment for things he had done previously.

Candice was clean and off drugs at the time of her interview, but because her circumstances have not mimicked the circumstances that led her to start using drugs initially, an abusive relationship, she is unable to predict whether she will use drugs again in the future:

It was towards it all, because still to this day I always say I can never say I'd never go back because I've never been placed back in those ... I've never been back into an abusive relationship; I've never been. I've never had life to hit me so hard to where I'm like I just need this to be blocked out.

- Candice

Despite Candice's hesitance to say she knows that she is sober and will stay sober, she has been through a number of substance abuse classes and has had a tremendous change in

circumstances since she was last using drugs. She discussed all of the programs she went through while incarcerated:

I went through several programs. I went through re-entry, I went through substance abuse, I went through the RSAT program, I went through parenting class, I went through motivation for change. I tried all kind of programs. Finally, I decided, "You know what? I'ma just try Faith and Character." And Faith and Character is when I learned who I was. That's when I learned what I wanted, my worth ... I learned everything there.

- Candice

In addition to going through these programs and strengthening her faith and character, Candice did end up in a relationship. At the time of her interview she was married to someone she described as encouraging and who enhances her character and faith. All of these aspects - increased faith, the knowledge acquired from the other programs, and her new healthy marriage serve as protective factors for her.

Eight of the nine women not reporting any issues with substance abuse is a significant factor of this study. This demonstrates that abstaining from substance abuse may be a protective factor during the reentry process and may increase the likelihood of an ex-prisoner successfully reentering. Even acknowledging Candice's successful recovery from substance abuse demonstrates that when recovery increases, the chances of successfully reentering increases. It is important to note, all of the factors that helped Candice reenter are also protective factors to the reentry process in general.

Health

Physical health did not prove to be a significant issue among the group of women. One participant, Danie, discussed having physical health problems that impacted her ability to work.

While Danie was the only participant that discussed any issues in regard to physical health, she was also the only participant who was over the age of 60. She explains:

My health was going down. I ended up in the hospital with my legs all messed up. They was hurting. It was just too much. So, I decided, you know what? You just need to go ahead on and retire, because you're 65 years old. You still have money to live on, but for the extras [expenses] you'll get a part time job. You know, if you want anything extra, so that's what I'm doing.

- Danie

She also mentioned that she suffered from a stroke a couple of years before she was convicted, which takes a huge toll on her health now. Despite physical health problems being discussed by Danie, none of the other participants discussed any related issues or concerns with the impact that physical health has had on them during reentry. This suggests that good physical health among ex-prisoners' reentry has a significant impact on their ability to successfully reenter. The impact that Danie's physical health had on her ability to work forced her to retire.

Although all but one of the participants had no physical health issues, mental health issues were extremely prevalent amongst the group of women. Eight out of nine of the women identified with dealing with some form of mental health issue at some point after incarceration. At the time of the study, only five out of nine of the women confirmed that they still suffer from some form of mental health issues occasionally. All of the women who confirmed suffering from some form of mental health issues identified with depression. Usually the depression correlated with their life circumstances; for example, if they were having difficulty obtaining a job or connecting with friends and/or family, they were more likely to be depressed. One of the participants stated that her depression has been prevalent in different capacities:

I was depressed right before [I moved back to Atlanta], so April. I have to just pray, I just pray:

- E.

She explained how that since she has left prison, mentally, it feels like not much has changed:

I feel like I'm still doing time.

- E.

This was a common feeling amongst women who felt like their mental health suffered post-incarceration.

Another participant, Chanel, discussed how it was hard for her to see where she could have been in life when comparing herself to her peers. Additionally, it was hard for her to know that only she was responsible for the predicament she was in:

*I mean let's be clear. You can be the most secure person on earth, if you went to kindergarten, first, second grade with a certain group of people and you see them doing some stuff that you not doing and you know the only reason why you're not doing it is because you didn't handle business the way you should have, that s*** makes you feel some type of way. It's not because you have low self-esteem, it's because like d***, I just let go of all my opportunities and just did some dumb stuff and now I'm in this position and you can't reverse some stuff, you know what I'm saying?*

- Chanel

Although, Chanel expressed feeling depressed as a result of her decisions, her responses demonstrated that these low points also encouraged her. Low points motivated her to change her life around and fix what she could of her circumstances:

*I can't go back in time and undo anything, so yeah, I used to have those moments where I'd be like man, but I realized that being hard on myself caused me to do absolutely nothing because when I used to be depressed, I used to be like depressed like ... in the bed, I ain't trying to eat, I ain't trying to wash my butt, I used to be bad. I just had to suck that s*** up and be like well what's done is done girl, move on.*

- Chanel

Tip explains that her depression is triggered when she gets overwhelmed. She was prescribed medication for coping, but tries to refrain from using it as much as possible. She likes to use other coping mechanisms before resorting to using medication:

I try not to take those often cause I work right now, but when I start to feel down I'll take one then. But I pray, I pray a lot, and I have my friends I'll talk to them a lot. So it's just sometimes. I always get depressed. I'm a single mom. I'm doing it by myself, I stayed with my mother for like a year, if not that, I don't think that I could've got my own apartment so it's just been me and my kids... It gets tough having to do everything on my own with work, and then coming home and being a mom. So sometimes it's just a lot on me and I feel down, and I'll take one of the pills so I don't take them everyday.

- Tip

Trina explained that she learned how to cope with her anxiety attacks and mental health issues while incarcerated. Unfortunately, Trina was not aware of her depression prior to her time incarcerated, but she learned during her sentence that she was depressed prior to her sentence and during her sentence:

I had a panic attack not long ago, so they're frequent, but I know how to cope with them.

I learned that in one of those classes that they taught in prison. Like how to cope with your anxiety or depression.

- Trina

Overall, these women have expressed a number of different ways that they have overcome and dealt with mental health issues. A change in mindset, prayer, medication, prison courses, and counseling have all been identified as coping mechanisms used by the participants.

Acknowledging that all of these women were able to find a way to cope is something to consider. Alleviating excess mental stress for women with mental health issues could greatly improve the probability of them successfully reentering.

Social Support

Support was a consistent factor among all of the participants. Most participants emphasized the support received by family, friends, churches, bosses, or community service members throughout their interview without being asked about the topic. While all of the participants did receive some form of support, not all of the participants had positive relationships with their families. However, even if a participant may have not had the support they desired from their family, support was still obtained from other places. Three out of nine participants experienced significant strain on their relationships with at least one family member and still successfully reentered. This means that even if there is strain between ex-prisoners and family members, substituting the support that would usually be provided by a family member with another source of support is still beneficial to successful reentry. For some participants, obtaining support from family members was not an option simply because their families were unable to provide:

To be honest I'm not going to act like it was a strain, I feel like she just didn't have the money to be there more. Like when [my kids] did come see me it was when my dad brought them to see me.

- E.

While reviewing the interviews, it was clear that support offered by way of housing or donations were not the only significant forms of support for this group of women, emotional support meant just as much to some. One participant, Trina, explained how she is naturally more independent, but she appreciated the emotional support that her mother provided to her from a distance. Another participant, Carol, discussed how upon obtaining a job at a local grocery store, her boss requested that she started working as a cashier. Carol stressed her preference to work as a stocker, in doing so, her boss declined:

I said I don't want to do that. I want to stock because I never did that before... I don't want to be over anybody's money. And he was like, "I have confidence in you. I know you can do it." – I never heard that from anybody before.

- Carol

While this incident may seem miniscule on the surface, the belief that Carol's boss placed in her encouraged Carol to believe in herself. Carol went on to explain how one day she ran into a correctional officer who worked where she was previously incarcerated and was told, "I am so proud of you." Carol did not initially see what the correctional officer saw in her, as she did not understand what there was for her to be proud of. After thinking about it more, she realized what she had achieved and how far she had come since being incarcerated. Both of these incidents demonstrate some of the emotional support that was provided to Carol during her reentry process.

In Carol's situation specifically, these two incidents could play a substantial role in how she views herself, encouraging her to continue progressing. The way one views themselves has been known to play a big role in their success or failure in any given obstacle (Immarigeon & Maruna, 2004; Schlager, 2018). In addition to allowing Carol to view herself more positively, the emotional support and encouragement motivated her to learn a new skill which has increased her marketability.

Even participants who emphasized that they received no support reentering, demonstrated at least one significant occasion of support that aided to the participants' reentry:

"I've actually been on my own since the day I walked out of those transitional center doors."

-Tip

Later in the interview she emphasizes:

"I met two good friends while I was incarcerated and they've been my support system thankfully."

-Tip

When discussing the steps she took to obtain her own apartment, Tip explained that she was able to save her money while her mother allowed her to live with her for a year. Additionally, her mother also allowed her to use her car for transportation as long as Tip was paying the car note. Although Tip had not felt like she received much support during her reentry, the support was there. This calls into question what other forms of support could have been present in other participants' reentry journeys that were possibly overlooked by both the researcher and the participants.

Children

Of the women seven out of nine of the participants had children. This suggest that children may play a vital role in the process of reentry for mothers. From the findings of this study, it is hypothesized that children provide a form of emotional support for mothers. Children aid as a motivational factor to get their lives back on track for the benefit of their children. The women in this study demonstrate that this is typically for one of two reasons, either to protect/provide for their children or to be an example to their children:

I'm going to make sure my daughter straight, make sure she's good for college. I made it home for her high school graduation, prom, all of that. That's a blessing.

- Lo

I got out on Monday and by Friday, I was back trying to figure out how can I make ends meet, how can I provide for my five children, how can I survive.

- Candice

Going through the battle of determining how to provide for one's child can be a motivational factor that encourages legitimate income, but it can also be a stress factor that encourages mothers to engage in criminal activity to make ends meet. This was the case for Candice. She was arrested for her second offense not even six months after being released for her first offense. She was charged with a number of offenses, and she ended up serving approximately five more years in prison. Candice explained that the second time she was released, she had more support from her family which helped with her successfully reentry. In spite of the support received from her family, she also felt the need to protect her kids more due to abuse they suffered during her second incarceration:

I knew it's no way I can come home and do the same thing because, at this point, not only am I suffering from this place, my kids are suffering at this point.

- Candice

Candice's story demonstrates how children can be both protective factors and risk factors during the reentry process. She also demonstrates how significantly different outcomes are possible while facing very similar circumstance.

Tip is a single mother, living by herself and working a fulltime job. She is able to provide for her children, despite the accompanying expenses. Despite her successful reentry, she often gets overwhelmed by the demand of being a single mother of two children. She still makes ends meet. Tip's circumstances show that despite difficult times, the will to provide overcomes the desire to give up. In conclusion in regards to children, having more responsibility as a result of motherhood can be stressful, but the ratio of mothers compared to non-mothers in this study suggests that it is possible that the impact of having children may outweigh the additional strain caused by needing to care for them.

Community Service Members

Some participants did obtain support from community service members, such as parole or probation officers. Although only a few participants discussed receiving support from their parole/probation officers (POs), the individuals who did feel that their POs were supportive emphasized that the support received by them was significant. Three out of seven participants explained that their POs were extremely supportive of their successful reentry. Some emphasized how they would never forget their parole officers:

I'll never forget her name. That was my first parole officer. She was wonderful. She encouraged me so much and she was like, I love what you're doing with this group thing, If I know anybody or need anybody to get involved, I'll let you know.

- Carol

Other participants even created business relationships with their probation/parole officers and now work as a team to help other probationers and parolees obtain jobs after incarceration:

The [PO] I have now is actually very supportive. I actually partner with him now to help people get jobs where I work since I'm the hiring manager.

- Tip

Tip continues with:

I was going to try to purchase a trailer. They wouldn't let me purchase it because they did a background check since I'm a convicted felon. He tried to write a letter of recommendation for me to get the trailer. It didn't work, but he tried to help.

- Tip

Tip demonstrates in the last portion of the quote that although her PO's attempt at helping her was unsuccessful, she still viewed the attempt as support and encouragement. This means that effort alone can make a difference in somebody's life and can be viewed as support. Most of the participants were indifferent to their POs, or they viewed them as actors who were only there for their own financial gains. Remaining participants explained that by having so many POs, it was hard to build meaningful relationships with the them.

Instead, Lo emphasized the relationship that she built with her school counselors. She explained that they were not only helpful and supportive with school, but they were also extremely willing to offer guidance to help with general life experiences:

Because my counselors and stuff like that they're very helpful if I have a problem, not only just school, you know. We talk on personal levels as well.

- Lo

When considering these results, it is clear that the support obtained from community supervision officers was beneficial, but not required for successful reentry for this group of women. While any additional support is favorable, community supervision officers do not necessarily have to be held responsible for it. Considering the benefits plausible from the findings, encouraging strong, meaningful relationships between ex-prisoners and POs could potentially facilitate better reentry rates for individuals returning from prison who have no other forms of support.

Furthermore, the support discussed in these examples only represents a portion of the support discussed by this group of women. Participants received a beneficial amount of support whether it was from probation officers, school counselors, friends, family, friends met during incarceration, church groups, and/or bosses. There were numerous sources of support in this group of participants, whether known or unknown by the participants. Nevertheless, no matter if the support was tangible or emotional, all support was beneficial to successful reentry of these participants.

Spirituality

Spirituality was a significant factor among the participants. Of the nine women, all described themselves as being either spiritual or religious. Seven out of nine of the women identified as Christians, one out of nine women identified as spiritual, and one out of nine women identified as Judaism. Five out of the nine women explained that their time incarcerated strengthened their relationship with God. Carol and Tip explain that they feel like God was the reason for their incarceration:

I feel like I was put there. God needed more of my time to be spent with Him, because I had too much of my focus on things outside of prison.

- Carol

I always say, there is no way they can just you in prison for defending yourself, and that's all I was doing that night [that I got arrested] and I always say that. That was God who sat me down.

- Tip

Both Carol and Tip described their lives before incarceration as either painful or out of order. Carol went through a number of problems with her ex-husband and ex-best friend. She she grew angry towards Christians because her ex-husband was a preacher and treated her badly. Carol felt that all Christians were all her ex-husband and lacked genuine kindness:

So I was very angry at people that profess to be Christian or have anything to do with God, just angry. But then I started to read the Word while I was there, praying and I stayed in Bible study and I did all those thing which kept me and I began to feel a healing process.

- Carol

Carol even became a chaplain during her time incarcerated. She enjoyed helping other women in their times of need:

I started being a chaplain there and helping people who get phone calls and bad news about their kids or their mother died or the father or children or anything of that nature.

- Carol

Tip explains that while she did not have any anger towards God or Christianity, that she was not living her life the way God would see fit. Amongst other things she explains:

Before I was in jail I wasn't thinking about getting a job, I didn't think about doing anything. [So] God sent me there to get my life together and I did. [Now] I just try to be the best person that I can be.

- Tip

Another woman, Lo, described that her entire reentry process was quite simple; she gives all of the credit to God. Her responses throughout the interview came back to God and her being blessed. When prompted about what her biggest obstacle during reentry was, she explained:

I'm trying to think. Cause I was just blessed honestly. I was just blessed. I can't do anything but just thank God because I was really just blessed.

- Lo

She described how her family would frequently be there to remind her that God is protecting her and has blessings in store for her. Candice is also a participant whose answers frequently resorted back to God and what he has done to get her where she is. Once she was able to learn more about herself, she was able to get her life on track:

I just held onto what I know. I kept God first and I learned, built a relationship. I came home and still today that's my strength. That's my everything. That's what I still hold onto. My faith in Him. It's been awesome.

- Candice

E. explains how she feels that God has been her main source of support throughout her journey of reentry:

Overall I feel like God has still been with me... he hasn't left my side. He's just kept me through a lot. Like I've seen people in worst situations, so I'm not complaining.

- E.

She also emphasized that prayer has been her main form of coping with her episodes of depression.

Trina's time incarcerated actually introduced her to Judaism. Although she grew up Christian, she explains how once she was able to find Judaism she learned about forgiveness and compassion:

For the most part becoming a part of that community shed a lot of light on unbelievable forgiveness, that and I don't know I just experienced so much love, so much compassion. Like this group of people had everything I needed outside of what I was trying to learn and they made me feel welcome.

- Trina

Trina's conversion to Judaism demonstrates that belief in a higher power regardless of religion can still be beneficial to reentry.

Although all of the women identified with spirituality or religion, some of the women did not give spirituality credit for their reentry the way others did. Despite spirituality and religion being a significant factor among this group of women, three out of nine participants only discussed the topic when prompted by the researcher. When Chanel was asked about her spirituality and whether it had a significant impact on her success, she explained:

You know what? No. I feel like being a logical person has. You know what I'm saying, you only gotta show me once that I'm gonna get burnt by the fire for me to know that. I ain't tryin' to get burnt again. Like for real, it's logic. I don't have to believe in God to know that certain stuff will result in certain stuff, so nah.

- Chanel

Despite her proclaiming that her spirituality and religion had not had a significant impact on her reentry, her statement still exemplifies a belief in her own self-efficacy, demonstrating the belief she has within herself.

Similarly, Chartisia explained that while she believes in a god, she does not necessarily know what to believe in religiously. Despite this, she still prays and knows that there is a higher power that is protecting and guiding her:

Yeah. So, what I've learned to trust is what I know for a fact and this doesn't mean that I don't believe in God. I'm not anti-anything, but when I pray, I pray to the giver of life because that's something we can't deny. The creator of the universe. I don't believe it just boomed from somewhere.

- Chartisia

In addition, she also discussed setting goals for herself and making them happen; demonstrating a belief in herself and her ability to succeed as well:

I think it's just inside, the determination that you have, whatever it is that's motivating you. If you have any type of support group, they need to be the right kind of group that's pushing you toward being successful and accomplishing your goals, and you have to just make a conscious decision to not do certain things... and be whatever it is that you want to be.

- Chartisia

The impact of spirituality is quite significant for majority of the sample. Participants that lacked spirituality or belief that their successful reentry was a result of God, displayed more belief in themselves. This could mean that although belief in God can be very beneficial to individuals reentering, if an individual does not necessarily believe in God, believing in themselves and all they are capable of can still act as a protective factor.

Transportation

After being released from prison, all of the women were able to obtain some form of transportation. Some forms of transportation included borrowing a family member or friend's car, asking for a ride, using a ride providing service such as Uber, or taking the bus. Despite all of these methods involving some difficulty, they were the most common among the women and the least burdensome. Two women described more strenuous forms of transportation. Chanel frequently had to use her bike to ride into the city of her town while she was job hunting:

I don't like to exhaust my resources, so I'd rather just save the car for when it's raining outside and when it's not I'll just ride my bike. Then I gradually upgraded, like I went from a bike to a mo-ped and then eventually I was able to afford a car.

- Chanel

Another participant, Candice, discussed how taking the bus and walking were practically her only options until she was able to obtain a car.

God broke it down to where, nobody would give me a ride nowhere. I had to catch the bus and take my kids to school. Sometimes I had to walk my smaller kids to school and then walk 10 more miles to work. Walk back in the evening in the hot sun with boots and a long sleeve shirt. I had to do that for a year.

- Candice

Despite none of the women having a car of their own when they were released from prison, they were all able to get tasks done that would require transportation, like searching for a job or taking their children to school. Although some situations were not ideal, they were all able to cope with limited resources.

Cultural Mistrust

Cultural mistrust was not a significant factor among women. Most of the women explained how they get along well with all people regardless of their cultural backgrounds. All but one of the women described themselves as a “people-person” or either explained that they have no problem with building relationships with people of other races. Many made comments such as:

It's hard to find someone I don't like.

- Trina

God said, “don't judge the outer appearance of a man, look at the heart.” I love all races. Everybody is not bad. There are some good people. You can't think that everybody is bad.

- Carol

I've built relationships with any and everybody.

- Candice

One participant explains that she is hesitant of relationships with people of different cultures due to experiences she has had with individuals who are white. The participant expressed her position regarding cultural mistrust by discussing events she encountered during work:

This girl called the police and I was done with her property, she didn't say anything to me. She saw me through the window, doing the yard, in my uniform, with my work truck, with my equipment on the yard. She called the police, the police came to the street I was on because I was no longer on her street. They found me and one pulled up behind me, then one sped past, and turned around, and blocked the front. So now they were blocking

*my truck in. As they were doing this, I'm still just doing what the f*** I'm doing on the yard, because I'm like, really? ... So then finally they were like, "What are you doing?" I was like, "What?" ... They were like, "Can I see your paperwork?"*

- Chanel

Although she expressed this incident as an example of the type of circumstances that make her skeptical regarding individuals who are white, she still expressed having relationships with white coworkers. This demonstrates that her skepticism does not prevent her from important everyday interactions. Despite Chanel being the only person to clearly express her concerns regarding race and how it can impact life, her interview proves the ability of an individual to be skeptical and still succeed in building meaningful relationships.

Law Enforcement Officers

Only two women discussed any type of negative views towards law enforcement officers. When prompted to discuss their views of law enforcement, most of the individuals that discussed any negative feelings expressed them towards the criminal justice system, rather than law enforcement officers. Trina describes her views of law enforcement following incarceration:

The very system that I thought was going to protect me failed me in so many ways. One being that officer telling me if I called again [about her fiancé abusing her] he was going to arrest me and my fiancé... It's just things like that that change my opinion about law enforcement. I would have never had that opinion of them had I not gone through incarceration. I feel that too, that there's not enough law for domestic violence victims, battered women, any of that. Especially when I went down I'm not really sure about now, but I know when I went down there was no "battered women's law", "protect yourself law", or anything. If anything I feel like there should have been things in place just to

circumvent putting me under an umbrella with voluntary [manslaughter] you know someone who killed somebody voluntarily. They put you under that one umbrella but nobody's looking at the circumstances. So that gave me a different view on the whole judicial system. Because like I said, I never encountered them but I always thought that – okay, you know the police they're here to help, but I never thought anything about law enforcement until after I got into the situation.

- Trina

Likewise, Danie's views of the law enforcement officers changed after her encounter with the criminal justice system as well. When prompted about her views of the criminal justice system prior to incarceration, she stated that she viewed them as helpful. When Danie was asked about her views of law enforcement after incarceration she explained:

I guess I'm a little reluctant, because I don't really trust them now, because of some things I went through when I was in prison. There's a certain amount of trust, that I realized that your just couldn't have with law enforcement.

- Danie

When asked about what events happened that made her feelings change, she explained:

All of them weren't very supportive of you. Some of them would actually do things to set you up to get you in trouble. I didn't understand that. I said, "Why would you do that? Why would you do that to that person who's already in trouble?" I began not to trust certain ones.

- Danie

Chanel also discussed more distrust for the justice system rather than law enforcement officers.

When asked about how she views law enforcement officers, she explained:

*I ain't gonna lie to you. I don't even know if I view them any crazier than I view the judges and the DA. Them, they the f*****, they the ones that's f***** up.*

- Chanel

She further explains:

I can't even look at the officers, because they regular people just doing the most. Just like criminals, just doing the most. It's all the same to me because what they're doing is illegal. But they don't have to face the consequences because there is somebody above them who's deciding that what they did was okay and deciding what the other person did equaled them dying.

While all three women have some form of distaste for law enforcement officers or the criminal justice system as a whole, they have not allowed their views to create additional barriers to their reentry. This exemplifies that regardless of an individual's stance on criminal justice system and/or law enforcement, their support or resentment towards the entity does not necessarily increase one's likelihood to fail at reentering.

Most of the women described feeling indifferent to law enforcement officers. Tip explained that since she has been so focused on herself and progressing her life, she has had to detach herself from the way that police officers are portrayed in the media:

They haven't done anything to affect me. They've done some things that I don't agree with to my black community, but... to be honest with you, I try not to get too involved within the world because I have so much stuff going on with myself, you know. I just can't be within the world.

- Tip

Overall, based on the results, cultural mistrust is not a prevalent factor among this group of women. This could be because low presence of cultural mistrust increases the likelihood of successful reentry. Alternatively, this could also mean that cultural mistrust is generally not a prevalent factor among this demographic of women. Considering this group of women's relationship with law enforcement and the criminal justice system in general, one should also consider how likely it would be for any ex-prisoner to actually favor the criminal justice system as opposed to feeling indifferent or dislike towards the entity following incarceration.

Biggest Obstacles

Participants were asked to discuss what they viewed as their biggest obstacles during reentry for two main reasons. One is that there would be an emphasis put on different struggles discussed throughout the interviews. The second is that there may be some responses that produce other emerging themes that were not brought up in the interview questions. Participants described obstacles such as locating resources, finding a job, rebuilding their relationship with family, overcoming the stigma associated with incarceration, and the fear they had of not being accepted by their peers. Of all of these obstacles, the only one that was mentioned more than once was the fear of not being accepted by people and the stigma that they are left with after incarceration. As Candice and Tip explain:

Getting past people and what they would think of me.

- Candice

I was more nervous of coming home and being a changed person that I was. And I was scared about that people would accept me now that I've changed and I'm not the same girl that I was before I walked into those doors.

- Tip

This is an understandable fear. Not only could it be worrisome thinking about whether or not family and friends would be accepting, but the stigma that results from being incarcerated can prevent individuals returning from prison from completing a number of task that other law abiding citizens could complete with ease. As discussed in prior results, stigma can prevent people from being candidates for jobs and obtaining housing.

Other responses did not appear to be prevalent obstacles among the group, rather the responses demonstrated obstacles that were only relatable to the individual participant responding. For example, one participant explained:

Well, the hardest thing is dealing with my family. You building that bond back together because um, you know, when you've been to prison and you are just coming out, maybe you have some family members that may want you around and you have some that may not want you around. Or who may want you at their house or who may not want you at their house.

- Carol

While only few of the participants discussed facing issues when trying to reconnect with family members, Carol happened to be the only participant that described this as the biggest obstacle faced.

“Successful” Reentry

As a result of completing interviews and reviewing the content found, it was decided, late into the interviewing process to ask participants what they view as successful reentry. This study called for African American women who served at least one year in prison and viewed themselves as successfully reentered. It was believed that in order to better promote belief of one's self, it should be left up to the qualifying participants to determine whether or not they

have successfully reentered and what it means to them. Only the last two participants were able to give their responses, due to the late inclusion of the question. Their responses are as follows:

Successful reentry means having a new start and successfully starting over.

- Danie

When your mindset changes. I say mindset, because I tell young girls, young boys all the time today it don't take me being saved to say I'm not going back to prison. It don't take me being saved, it just take my mindset saying "I will not wake up and go to bed when you tell me to, I will not eat your cold food, I will not go work in that heat for two years straight cutting grass, and then all you do is give me a sandwich with an orange or an apple with a spoiled milk."

- Candice

When considering the other participants' interviews and trying to determine what they view as successful, it seems that the other respondents may view successful reentry as the sheer determination and will to successfully adjust to society once released and not reoffend. Despite all of the women being law abiding citizens since their reentry, many of them still had obstacles that they struggled with day-to-day. The women describe not having enough income or basic benefits, such as life insurance or a 401(k) plan. Trina explains:

I feel like all the time I'm constantly trying to catch up. It's a constant race to catch up or to try to get to where I need to be because, 42, I don't have health insurance, I don't have life insurance. I don't have those things established for me even in this stage. Could I go get a job that has benefits and this and that? I'm sure I can, but it's always a race to catch up to where I want to be, and you know I want to have a retirement. I don't want to

keep just saving this money for the next thing, I want to save this money for 40 years from now.

- *Trina*

Although Trina has successfully reentered, she still has goals that she feels she needs to work towards - just as other participants explained. E. discusses how she would not have even considered herself as successfully reentered until just three weeks before she completed her interview. This is despite her being released from prison for almost four years. Lacking adequate sources of support, income, and stable housing made her feel as though she had not successfully reentered society.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

The purpose of this study is to add to the existing research on African American women and reentry by analyzing their experiences of successful reentry with qualitative interviews. Analyzing the perceptions of African American women who have actually been through the reentry process and are able to identify with “successfully reentering”, allows the opportunity to discover emerging patterns and similarities among this specific demographic of women. Subsequently, this study can be used as a point of reference for the future. To offer meaningful analysis, it is important that the findings of this study are examined by comparing them to the literature and by considering the relationship that different barriers and factors have together.

Of all of the topics discussed throughout the interviews, support and spirituality appeared to be the most significant factors among the participants. All of the participants discussed believing in a higher power and all of the participants received emotional or financial support in some way. All of the participants had at least a high school diploma or General Education Development Diploma. All but two of the participants were in transitional housing prior to reentering society; while the two participants who did not go through transitional housing were able to obtain referrals for jobs at some point after being released. Additionally, only one participant suffering from a substance abuse issues, demonstrates that a lack of substance abuse among the group of participants is also a significant factor. Despite a few of the participants exemplifying some form of cultural mistrust, none of the participants that demonstrated signs of cultural mistrust were incapacitated by its prevalence. Lastly, while transportation could have been an issue for a number of the participants, all of the participants were able to obtain reliable transportation.

Support, spirituality, and employment, provided a great deal of help to these women during their reentry process. All of the women had support in some way. As mentioned, E. did not begin to feel as though she had successfully reentered until after returning to Atlanta, Georgia and receiving an abundance of support from a friend that offered to help her obtain a job, have reliable transportation, and assist her in finding a place to stay. Support was a major factor whether it was through family, friends, community supervision officers, or other community service members such as counselors. Even participants that felt they had not been supported demonstrated that support was offered and given during their reentry process through a variety of different sources. Support helped participants with vital barriers such as having a place to stay immediately after reentry, giving participants money when they did not have any of their own, and offering words of encouragement that some women may have not ever heard prior to incarceration. Like acknowledged in Johnson's (2014) study, support was brought up by 88% of the participants in this study, suggesting that it was an extremely helpful aspect for most of the women.

Spirituality or belief in something also appeared to be a significant factor among this group of women. All of the women demonstrated some faith in a higher power, even if they were unaware of a specific religion to follow. In relation to other topics discussed, such as cultural mistrust, the results align with the literature and demonstrate that spirituality may act as a protective factor for ex-prisoners (Link & Oser, 2018). Furthermore, when reviewing the interviews provided, it appeared as though, spirituality also could be considered as a form of emotional support for participants. Spirituality provided a lot of women with encouragement to overcome different barriers during their reentry journey. Despite E. feeling like she had not

successfully reentered for almost four years after being released from prison, she expressed how she felt that God was her reason for still going and not giving up.

None of the participants had any substance abuse problems at the time of the study and only one of the participants ever identified with a substance abuse problem at any time during their life. This supports the findings of Bahr et. al (2010) which suggests that substance abuse is a key factor as to whether or not parolees go back to prison; out of all of the participants, only one had more than one offense and she happened to be the same participant that discussed suffering from substance abuse issues. A lack of substance abuse among the group demonstrates that encouraging ex-prisoners to not only get sober, but to stay sober after incarceration is important. The only participant that did identify with substance abuse issues was able to overcome them with the help of a faith based program that she had access to while in prison; this further supports the idea that spirituality is a significant factor during reentry and can impact a number of barriers and how they affect ex-prisoners. Based on this, it would be beneficial to further study substance abuse treatment and prevention within this demographic from a strengths-based approach. We know how the participant of this study was able to overcome substance abuse and successfully reenter, but how does her experience compare to other success stories?

It was clear that transportation was not as strenuous of an obstacle for this group of participants to overcome, but transportation should also be considered a significant factor among this group of participants. Despite transportation not being a strenuous factor for the group, all of the women were able to remedy the barrier and travel as needed. As discussed, in order to remedy transportation issues, most women were had to obtain rides or use public transportation. Alternatively, participants who were not able to obtain rides or use public transportation were

able to obtain transportation through family or friends, or by purchasing their own vehicle with money saved from transitional housing. Transportation was the only topic that was discussed by the participants only when prompted by the interviewer 100% of the time. This demonstrates that while it was an obstacle for the participants, it was not an obstacle that was significant enough for any of the participants to bring up independently.

Based on the findings of this study, obtaining transportation was not something that would be viewed as a major barrier for this group participants. While it was an aspect that needed involvement and planning on behalf of participants in order to successfully get from one location to another, the results of this study do not demonstrate that an individual reentering society would have any more difficulty obtaining a ride than an individual who has never been incarcerated. Alternatively, overcoming barriers that result from a lack of transportation could be viewed as a significant contributor to successful reentry, which does align with existing literature (Johnson, 2014). The results of this study suggest that the impact of transportation and a lack thereof be further examined in order to better understand what sets ex-prisoners' need for transportation apart from any individuals need for transportation.

Following transportation, education was another topic that did not demonstrate a very significant impact on the participants. While all of the participants had either a General Education Development Diploma or a high school diploma, education revolving around academia did not demonstrate a very significant impact on the participants. Although education did appear to be significant in some ways, such as: introducing participants to coping mechanism for mental health and substance abuse issues, reintroducing participants to spirituality and strengthening their faith, and providing the participants with skills and training for a variety of different work-related fields, only one of the participants having a bachelor's degree

demonstrates that continuing education at the collegiate level is not necessary for successful reentry. Based on the findings of this study, collegiate level education may not have been a necessary factor among this group because of two reasons. First, the participants were all eventually able to find positions that allowed them to acquire some financial stability, even if was only paycheck to paycheck. The financial burden that accompanies the process of reentry is by far one of the most important barriers to overcome and as discussed by the participant, Trina, the immediate impact of financial burden outweighs the burden of attending college. Second, with ex-prisoners having such a difficult time obtaining a job with a felony, one would have to consider - if it is so difficult obtaining lower income jobs with a criminal record, will one have to face the same difficulties when applying for higher paying jobs, despite obtaining a college degree? Education having an impact on employment and not having a significant impact on desistance aligns with prior studies that have focused on education and incarceration (Seiter & Kadela, 2003). Further research into the differences between ex-prisoner who are college graduates and ex-prisoners without bachelor's degree within this demographic could offer more insight into the true impact that education has within this demographic, if any.

The only unexpected, emerging theme that came from the interview process was transitional housing. All of but two of the women went through transitional housing prior to being released from prison. Additionally, out of all seven of the women that participated in transitional housing, only one of those women did not reap significant benefit from the program. All of the women that participated in transitional housing were able to obtain job history and have a position available to them once they were released from prison. Transitional housing also significantly helped most of the participants that went through it financially as well. The program gave all of the women the opportunity to save their money and invest towards big

purchases such as vehicles or housing once released. This supports the findings of O'Brien (2001) the women who participated in transitional housing in his study were also able to be much more independent during their reentry process. This suggests that transitional housing may be a very helpful factor for individuals reentering regardless of demographic because it alleviates some of the responsibility that social support has during the reentry process. Individuals being more likely to obtain employment if they went through transitional aligns with the suggestions of Immarigeon and Maruna (2004); ex-prisoners who are able to find stable work post-release have a less difficult time readjusting to society (Immarigeon & Maruna, 2004). Examining the difference between ex-prisoners that go through transitional housing and ex-prisoners that do not go through transitional housing would provide a better understanding of the impact of transitional housing. Further examination of transitional housing could also demonstrate that there may be incentive to make transitional housing a mandated program after incarceration.

Based upon the responses of the women throughout the entirety of the interviews, stigma appeared to be one of the most frustrating and prohibitive barriers faced by the participants. Stigma was what appeared to be the underlying cause of a lot of the participants' negative feelings about themselves. Additionally, stigma had a significant impact on the only two participants who did not go through transitional center housing. The two participants that did not participate in transitional housing were left with no job to rely on, and they were only remedied by referrals from friends after months of trying to obtain employment. Although stigma did not seem to impact the participants in many other ways, besides the ones discussed, the impact of not being able to find secure employment is likely to be detrimental to their successful reentry. This aligns with the findings of Immarigeon and Maruna (2004), the stigma that accompanies being

an ex-prisoner makes it much harder to overcome a number of barriers that are faced when reentering society after incarceration.

Cultural mistrust was not prevalent enough throughout this study to be considered a significant factor. Despite this, spirituality was a significant factor among the participants and possibly served as a protective factor to cultural mistrust, as discussed by Link and Oser (2018). Although cultural mistrust was not prevalent among the participants, the general feeling of participants towards law enforcement changed significantly after their encounter with the law. While this could be a factor that is unique to this group of participants, having a change of views regarding law enforcement does not necessarily have to be considered a trait unique to this demographic of women. In order to better understand the prevalence of cultural mistrust and mistrust of law enforcement among this demographic of women, studying African American women who have been convicted of a felony and women of other races who have also been convicted of a felony to examine the similarities or differences may provide a better understanding of cultural mistrust and its prevalence among African American women, if any.

The limitations of this study include the sample size of the group studied, the representativeness of the group studied, the reliability of the participants' responses, and the recruitment of the participants. First, the sample size of this group of participants is less than ten. This means that while insight can be gained from the overall study and findings, a larger group of women would have provided a better idea of what African American women deal with during the reentry process. Second, despite having a small sample size, the overall demographics of the group studied were not representative of most individuals reentering society. For example, all of the women had a high school diploma or GED, most of the women participated in transitional housing, only one of the women suffered from any form of substance abuse, and all but one of

the women were first time offenders. Third, while qualitative interviewing allows acknowledgment of the participants' stories from start to finish, the researcher had to trust that the information provided by the participants is truthful. Lastly, the main method used for recruitment was the snowball method, meaning that most of the participants knew each other and may have even be friends. The fact that a number of the participants may be in the same friend group means that their relationships may have influenced some of the similarities found throughout the research and could be the cause of some of the significant factors found.

There are a number of questions that can arise from the findings of this study. Based on the lack of substance use among the group, examining what specific factors help African American women overcome substance abuse issues may be beneficial. Further examining transitional housing and its impact on African American women reentering can also be useful. This study clearly demonstrates the benefits of transitional housing, but studying the cases of African American women that go through transitional housing and still recidivate may provide a better insight as to whether the program should be implemented more consistently as a routine procedure before release from prison. Furthermore, examining successful reentry of African American women that have not been through transitional housing can also provide insight into what it takes for African American Women returning. During the process of conducting this study, transitional housing was not expected to be experienced by a majority such a large number of participants. Based on the findings, it is clear that the program significantly assisted those who were able to go through the program prior to being released into society. It is believed that the experiences of individuals reentering would be much different for those who go without transitional housing.

Education was highly sought after for many of this study following their time incarcerated. Identifying cases of African American women who have reentered and successfully completed college, could provide more insight on how education post incarceration impacts them. Additionally, examining the impact of college education post-incarceration could encourage policies regarding individuals who have been incarcerated and education. If there are clear benefits to obtaining a degree post-incarceration, despite being labelled a “felon”, this could provide incentives for colleges to provide second chance programs for individuals returning. This could be providing staffing for individuals returning, with a discounted rate of on-campus housing, and tuition assistance.

Ultimately, the goal of this study was to provide insight and a voice for African American women going through the process of reentry after at least a year of incarceration. While some of the findings aligned with existing literature and some of the findings were unexpected, it is now the responsibility of researchers invested in the topics of reentry or African American women and the criminal justice system to further create avenues of understanding across these subjects. No phenomena can be improved while continuously being overlooked. Although incarceration is not a bad thing and serves a purpose to ensure safety within communities, as the saying goes, “too much of anything is bad for anyone,” and in this circumstance too much incarceration without the proper knowledge and policies for reentry is bad for the society and African American women.

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Appendix 1 – Interview Outline**How long were you in jail?****What year did you begin your sentence?****When were you released?**

- 1) Tell me about your story.
 - a. Tell me about your past experiences and how you became involved in the criminal justice systems.
 - b. Tell me about your story returning from prison.
- 2) What type of support did you have while you were reentering?
- 3) Did you have any specific goals at the beginning of your reentry process?
 - a. Are you still working towards those goals or do you feel that you have accomplished them?
 - b. If not, do you still have the same goals, or have they changed over time?

Family

1. Tell me about your family (or specific member mentioned). What was your relationship with them like?
2. Did a romantic partner help you during reentry?
3. During your reentry process, did you ever feel as though you did not have any support from your family?

Community Service Members

1. What type of support did your probation/parole officer provide while you were reentering?
2. Did you believe they had a positive impact on your success now?

Education

1. Did you try to return to school after prison?

2. Was this helpful to your reentry process?

Employment

1. Was it difficult for you to find a job after prison? How?
2. What were the steps you took while searching for a job?
3. Did you have any outside support while searching for a job from family, friends, probation officer, or anyone else?
4. Did you have any support searching for employment from family/friends or a probation officer?
5. What do you do to make a living now?

Finance

1. How was money an issue when returning from prison?
2. Did you receive any financial help when returning from prison?

Transportation

1. Was transportation an issue for you during your reentry process?
2. How did you get around?
3. How did you work around having a lack of transportation?

Health/Mental Health

1. Would you say that you have suffered from depression, anxiety, or any other mental health problems?
2. How did you cope with these issues?
3. Did you seek help, like treatment?

Substance Use

1. Was alcohol an issue for you after being released from prison?

2. Were drugs an issue for you after being released from prison?
 - a. How did you cope with this?
3. Were there any significant turning points that helped you overcome these battles?

Spirituality

1. Would you consider yourself to be a spiritual person before you were in prison?
 - a. What about during or after prison?
2. How would you describe your spirituality now?
3. Do you feel that spirituality has had a significant impact on your successful reentry?

Cultural Mistrust

1. Do you view building meaningful relationships with people of other cultures or communities as easy or difficult? Why or why not?
2. How did you view law enforcement prior to your time in prison?
3. How did you view law enforcement following your time in prison?
4. Do you feel that you had open communication with your probation/parole officer?

General questions

1. What would you say was your biggest obstacle faced during reentry?
2. What advice would you give to other women who are reentering?
3. Is there anything I haven't asked that you would like to share?
4. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix 2 - Demographic Questions

1. What is your date of birth? ____/____/____
2. What is your current marital status? (circle) Single/Never married Widowed Married
Partnered Separated Divorced Other: _____
3. Do you have children? Y/N
 - a. If yes, how many? _____
 - b. What are their ages? _____
 - c. Do any live with you? _____
4. How many people live in your household? _____
5. What is your highest level of education? (circle)
Some high school High school graduate/GED Some college
College degree Master's Degree or higher
6. What is your current job status? (circle)
Full-time Unemployed/not looking for work
Part-time Unemployed/not looking for work
Unemployed/full-time student Other: _____
7. What was your job status prior to incarceration? (*circle*)
Full-time Unemployed/not looking for work
Part-time Unemployed/not looking for work
Unemployed/full-time student Other: _____
8. Do you have a driver's license? Y/N
9. What is your current living situation? (circle)
Own Rent Shelter Group home Transitional Housing Assisted living
Living with someone else (Specify): _____
Other (Specify): _____
10. What was your living situation prior to incarceration? (circle)
Own Rent Shelter Group home Transitional Housing Assisted living
Living with someone else (Specify): _____
Other (Specify): _____
11. Have you had any previous mental health and/or substance abuse treatment?
Yes (please describe): _____
No